

Rapanui Interpretation of Written Numerals by the Spanish in 1770

Francisco Mellén Blanco
Spanish Association of Pacific Studies, Madrid
Trans: Steven Hawson

Two works discussing the presumed numeration of Easter Island as collected in the Journal of Capitan Francisco Antonio Aguera Infazón of the Spanish frigate *Santa Rosalia* in 1770 have recently been published by the Russian researchers Fedorova and Rjabchikov.

Both authors, as other researchers in the past, continue to make errors in the transcription of some of the numbers. The numeration of Fedorova contains only one error (*congoju*) and I am able to say that this work is one of the finest with regard to this subject.

One of the several conclusions reached at the Frankfort Symposium in 1989 "Situations and Perspectives of Scientific Research of Easter Island" was that researchers of Rapa Nui should be required to consult and study (among other works) the original documents of the first European expeditions to Easter Island (Roggeveen, González, Cook, and La Pérouse).

It is now possible to read the records of the expeditions in their original language, as they become published in the respective countries of these audacious sailors. It is also true that most researchers have read and studied these documents in a language other than the original, and it is herein that the errors lie. I have repeated several times in lectures and conferences that the English translation by Corney (1908) of the Spanish expedition of González de Haedo to Easter Island contains many errors, in both its transcription and printing.

As I mentioned above, the majority of authors (Ross 1936; Métraux 1936; Heyerdahl 1961; Barthel 1962; Fedorova 1969; Schumacher 1989 and Rjabchikov 1993) have based their research on that of Corney, and for that reason errors have appeared in their work. The following numbers have been transcribed incorrectly by Corney:

- "1" *coyana*
- "3" *coqujui*
- "4" *quiroqui*
- "6" *feuto*
- "7" *fegea*

After having read the interesting article by Fedorova (1993) about this subject and jumping the gun a bit on the publication of my next book "Easter Island, a Spot in the Blue" where a series of new researches shall appear that was not included in my last work (Mellén 1986), among which are found the Easter Islanders' interpretation of the numerals presented by the Spanish in 1770, I shall analyze here the following material which shall expand the work of Fedorova.

The manuscript of Capitan Aguera, which can now be found in the Mitchell Library (Dixson Library) in Sydney, Australia, corresponding to signature CY REEL 491, DL Ms 159, the presumed numeration (sheet 34v) given by the Easter Islanders to the Spanish numbers (Fig. 1) Aguera's

complete journal appears in my book (Mellén 1986) and the numeration has been transcribed on page 312 (1). The following numbers compiled by Aguera clearly appear on Figure 1:

uno.....	Cofana.....
dos.....	Cozena.....
tres.....	cogofu.....
Quatro.....	Quixore.....
Cinco.....	Mapana.....
Seis.....	teuto.....
Siete.....	tefa.....
ocho.....	Moxoqui.....
Nueve.....	Nifoxi.....
Diez.....	Tuon ^{ta} paipaca Tuon ^{ta} mowai.....

Figure 1: Copy of the numbers compiled by Capitan Aguera on Easter Island in 1770. (Manuscript, Mitchell Library, Sydney).

The original document which was studied, translated and transcribed by Corney (1908) and which was located in the General Archives of the Indies, Seville, Spain, has disappeared. The document has not been found in the archives since being seen by Corney. The transcription of the numerals published by Corney compared to the manuscript of Aguera of the Mitchell Library is flawed. The Spanish captain's journal located in Sydney is a more complete source than the one studied by Corney in Seville. The Sydney document covers the entire voyage to the Island and the return trip to the port in Callao (Peru), whereas the document that used to be in the Archives of the Indies covered only the

(1) (footnote) The numeration is also included on page 114, but with a typographical error: "moriqi" should read "moroqi".

outgoing voyage and the arrival at port San Carlos de Chiloé, Chile.

The analysis that we have made of these ten numerals expands, sustains, and/or annuls those noted by Irina Fedorova and vice versa. The philologist and researcher shall see when, how, and why each word must be used by its corresponding expression:

- 1 *cojana* (*ko hána*), heat, to feel/be hot; *ko hanga*, bay, cove; *ku hanga*, to like, want. Tah. *faa-na*, to appease, pacify; *fana*, arc.; yard.
- 2 *corena* (*ko rena*, *ko renga*), beautiful, pretty, (used to mean 'little girl'; *renga maruaki*, hungry little girl, *kore na*, not to exist there, there isn't any there; Tah. *reá*, an arm's length.
- 3 *cogoju* (*ko'ohu*) circle, to be circular in shape; *ohu*, to scream, *ka oho*, go away! *ku oho á te tangata*, the man has left; *ngohu* to eat eagerly.
- 4 *quirote* (*kirote*), *kiróto*, toward the inside; *ki roto*, to the lagoon; *ki rota*, to extract the juice from a plant; *kiroké*, a kind of edible seaweed.
- 5 *majanà* (*mahana*), warm, temperate; *mahána*, by heat; *maánga*, bait for fishing. Tah. *mahána* heat.
- 6 *teùto* (*te úto*), the buoy. Tah. *uto*, sprouted coconut.
- 7 *tejèa* (*te henga*), a fish of the species *Echeneidae*? which is caught in the *hakaranga* zone; *te henga*, splendor, brightness; *tehe*, drip, spill. Tah. *tehea*, which one?
8. *moroqui* (*moroki*), small fish that is used for bait; *moroki*, to make something in perfect condition, restore; *ahu moroki*, *ahu* made of well-placed stones.
9. *Vijoviri* (*vehi viri*) surround or wrap in a circle. Tah. *vio*, knotty; *viri*, to rig or roll up a sail.
10. *queromata* (*kero máta*), to finish cooking; ant. to finish webbing a net.

This last number (*queromata*) is accompanied with the words *paúpaca quacaxixiva*. (*Paú paka*), *paú*, spend, waste, scrape; *páka*, dry, to dry; *quacaxixiva* contains the syllable *ca* instead of *xi*, it is written this way in the *Gaceta de Lima* (Lima Gazette) no. 44(1771), where *quaxixixiva* appears for "house" or "hut" (see Mellén 1986:339-341).

The words used in this presumed numeration from Easter Island gathered by Capitan Aguera are of Polynesian origin, as Irina Fedorova shows extremely well, and with whom we are in complete agreement.

These words which are identified and interpreted incorrectly by many authors to be Easter Island numerals are in fact not related to numbers. They are Polynesian words (in this case, *rapanui*) which the Easter Islanders gave for figures written, drawn, interpreted or suggested by the Spanish sailors during their stay on board the ships anchored at Hanga Ho'onu. As Fedorova perfectly analyzes, these words have erroneously been studied as numerals, when in fact they never were. To relate these incorrect numerals with American languages would be utterly ridiculous.

So then, what was the interpretation given by the Easter Islanders of the numbers presented by or inquired about by the Spanish explorers?

Any researcher who reads the manuscripts of González will understand that the Spanish sailors were under orders to

note down everything that related to the islands and peoples they were visiting and exploring.

In one of my works regarding Easter Island (Mellén 1988) I indicated that in the manuscript section of the British Museum Library, on Ms. Add. 20.986, No. 25, a note appeared at the side of the document which read: "Having spoken in 26 languages, they understood nothing, as nothing even came close to their language; it leads one to think that this island was populated from the Orient, as they are more like them than like Americans." It is possible the Spanish attempted to utilize the majority of European languages, as well as Arabic, Quechua, and Aymara, since there were no doubt members of the crew who knew these languages, and by what the manuscript indicates, the Easter Islanders could not understand any of these languages.


The document from Capitan Aguera is more explicit when it points out in what way the words from his journal were compiled: *Dictionary of some significant words and terms from the Natives of San Carlos Island (aka Davis Island) those that have been able to figure out and understand from signs and demonstrations represented by drawings.* (see Mellén 1986:310).


Métraux analyzed these data in 1936 and was quite surprised to find that in a time period of only four years the Easter Island numerals compiled by Cook were completely different from those noted by Aguera. Métraux sensibly judged that Cook's list was correct, or at least more exact, than that collected by the Spanish, as the English Captain had Hitihiti, a native of Bora Bora, as an interpreter, and he could understand a few words of *rapanui*. The numbers interpreted

by Hitihiti were those also used in the Society Islands and Tuamotus. The words compiled by Aguera, however, had no connection with the words for numbers.

In my opinion, the numerical figures presented in drawings were possibly interpreted by the Easter Islanders as somewhat deformed

figures of their own *rongo-rongo* and so they translated them as such. They also related some of the figures to fish and marine objects. In Figure 2, I provide three examples based on the figures of the numerals.

A) The number 5 (*mahana*) is similar to the *rongo-rongo* figure:  This figure was found in the manuscript of Gabriel Hereveri Vaka Tukuonga, which is accompanied by

the other figures  with the text *Ina he mahana o te hora nei*, translated freely as 'it isn't hot'.

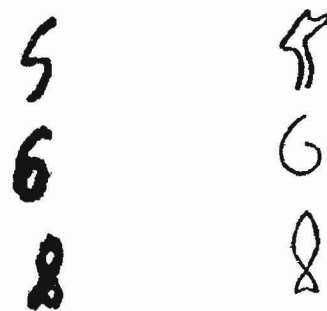


Figure 2: Numbers taken from eighteenth century Spanish manuscripts and *rongo-rongo* figures.

B) The number 6 translated as *te úto*, the buoy, requires no explanation. Archaeologists know this figure well, as it is still found in the petroglyphs of Ava o Kiri, Hanga Oteo, Ahu Ra'ai, and so on.

C) The number 8, when disfigured, represents a small fish known as *moroki*, which is used by Easter Islanders for bait.

I encourage researchers who study *róngo-róngo* to continue associating the numerical figures with other signs or marine objects connected with Easter Island words.

The similarity of some *róngo-róngo* figures with written numbers made by the Spanish is such that the Easter Islanders who boarded the ships interpreted them as *róngo-róngo* figures and not as numbers, which is what Agüera noted, not being able to understand the language.

Conclusions

- 1) The words presented in the Dictionary of Agüera which refer to numerals are, in fact, altered Polynesian terms, both in their transcription and pronunciation.
- 2) These words neither correspond to nor are related to numbers.
- 3) The numerical figures were possibly interpreted by the ancient Easter Islanders as *róngo-róngo* figures.

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